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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 001268

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SUBJECT: RUSSIAN MFA ON TRANSNISTRIA

Classified By: A/Pol M/C David Kostelancik for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary and Comment. Transnistria Conflict Negotiator Nesterushkin told us May 18 that DFM Karasin was planning to visit Chisinau and Tiraspol May 26-27 to pressure Smirnov to revoke the travel ban on Ambassador Chaudhry and EU negotiator Miszei, in order to make possible the next "3 plus 2" meeting. Nesterushkin did not rule another "2 plus 1" meeting between President Medvedev and the Moldovan and Transnistrian leaders, calling that meeting format "indispensable." However, Russia was leaving to the OSCE the organization of a "5 plus 2," which Nesterushkin saw as slipping to autumn. He defended Transnistria's reluctance to meet and called Smirnov's interest in maintaining power "natural and understandable." Russia appears to be playing both sides of the table, assisting in setting up "3 plus 2" talks and contemplating another "2 plus 1" summit, but not engaging on the more important revival of the "5 plus 2" format. End Summary and Comment

Russian engagement on Transnistria

¶2. (C) Russian Transnistria Conflict Negotiator Valeriy Nesterushkin told us May 18 that DFM Karasin was planning to visit Chisinau and Tiraspol May 26-27, and would use the visit to pressure Smirnov to revoke the travel ban on Ambassador Chaudhry and EU Transnistria negotiator Kalman Miszei, in order to make possible a "3 plus 2" meeting on Transnistrian soil. He did not expect Karasin to delve into the issue of reviving the "5 plus 2" talks proper, though, leaving that task to OSCE Ambassador Philip Remler. Nesterushkin noted that Remler on May 13 had already failed to convince Smirnov to lift the travel ban.

¶3. (C) In addition to the "5 plus 2" negotiation track, Nesterushkin did not rule out another invitation by President Medvedev to a "2 plus 1" meeting with the Moldovan and Transnistrian leaders, but cautioned that such a decision was premature until the new Moldovan government had been formed. However, he called the "2 plus 1" format that brought the leaders into direct dialogue "indispensable," and posited that a new "2 plus 1" meeting would use the March 18 joint declaration as a starting point.

¶4. (C) Nesterushkin said that Moldovan Foreign and European Integration Minister Andrei Stratan also had raised Transnistrian settlement prospects with Foreign Minister Lavrov during his May 5 visit to Moscow. However, Nesterushkin downplayed the significance of that discussion, saying the talks progressed no further than agreement that the conflict should be resolved "as soon as possible," without going into detail. The uncertainty of Stratan's position in the future GOM further reduced the impact of

Stratan's visit, Nesterushkin added.

Going slow on 5 plus 2

15. (C) Nesterushkin said that the plan of the April 28 "3 plus 2" meeting to hold an informal "5 plus 2" on the margins of the OSCE CSBM conference in Helsinki June 29-30 had fallen apart. Neither the time nor the venue of the talks called for in the March 18 joint statement by President Voronin and Smirnov were possible, due to the Greek OSCE chairmanship's need to prepare the June 27-28 meeting on European security in Corfu, as well as Finland's refusal to host the "5 plus 2." Nesterushkin could not provide an explanation for the Finnish reaction.

16. (C) While Ambassador Remler was attempting to find another time and venue for the "5 plus 2" meeting, Nesterushkin thought it "realistic" to expect the meeting to slip to September or October, given that the new Moldovan government had not yet formed, and that the summer break was coming fast.

17. (C) Despite Russia's engagement on setting up "3 plus 2" meetings, Nesterushkin said that Russia's influence on Smirnov was limited. Transnistria was "not ready" for a "5 plus 2" meeting, and it was "quite natural and understandable" that Smirnov did not want to lose his leadership position as a result of a conflict resolution. He allowed Smirnov might be persuaded if he were offered

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sufficient benefits, but so far "nobody has come forward to offer him any."
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